

Rhythm and Music

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Kūttu or Kūṭiyāṭṭam is the dramatic production of classical Sanskrit plays, utilizing stylised acting rather than dance. This exalted art form which dates back to around two thousand years was once renowned throughout India but now remains within the confines of the little state of Kerala. At the request of Indra and the other Devas, Brahma, the creator of the Vedas, chose the text from *Rigveda*, acting from the *Yajurveda*, music from the *Samaveda*, the aesthetic sentiments (rasās) from the *Atharvaveda* and created the fifth Veda or the *Natyaveda* (chakshusayājña) sacrifice that is visually realised, an entertainment that is audible and visible. The *Natyaveda* therefore is said to be *chaturvedasvarupa* (possessing the qualities of the four Vedas). Kūṭṭu and Kūṭiyāṭṭam are also cākṣuṣayājña which achieved name and fame first in heaven (*dēvaloka*) and then on earth (*bhūloka*). This art form has as its basis Sanskrit plays—some of the Sanskrit plays that are the sources of Kūṭiyāṭṭam are Bhasas's *Pratijnāyugaṇḍharāyana*, *Svapnāvāsavadatta*, *Avimāraka*, *Pratimanātaka*, *Abhisēkanātaka*, *Madhyamavyāyoga*, *Pancharātra*, *Dūtaghatōtkacha*, *Dūtavākyam*, *Bālacharita* and *Charudattam*; Sri Harsha's *Nāgānandam*, Āscharyachudamani by Saktibhadra, Kulasekharavarma's *Tapatisamvarana* and *Subhadradhānanjaya*, Neelakantha's *Kalyāṇasaugandhika*, Bodhayana's *Bhagavadajjuka*, Mahendravikrama Pallavās *Mattavilāsam* and such others.

In the early days, all the different parts of the Sanskrit drama, from *Sūtradhāra* *Purappādu* (the presentation of the Sūtradhāra or the narrator who explains/relates the story) till the Bharatavākyam, or the last division of the play were enacted. In the course of time, this mode of dramatic presentation was considerably changed to present only single acts. This procedure was also altered so that only certain sections from the acts were adopted for staging. It is in this manner that various acts like Anōttankam, Abhisārikāṅkam, Arattankam, Kapōlapatahāṅkam, Vasantasēṇāṅkam and such others originated. Side by side with this shortening of the Sanskrit plays, there occurred parallel changes in many observances in Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The conversation between the actress (*nati*) and the *Sūtradhāra* which acted as introduction to the drama was omitted altogether. The invocational verse (*Nāṇḍislōka*), which introduced and explained the scene, came to be recited separately for each act. The *mutiyakkitta* (the final bath and symbolic burning of the *yajnasāla* after the sacrifice), the *avabhṛta* (final bath at the end of the sacrifice) of the *chakshusayājña*, came to be necessarily observed at the closing of Kūṭiyāṭṭam as well. The Tamilchollal (abridged story presented in *manipravālabhāsa* or a mixture of Malayalam and Sanskrit) which was usually rendered immediately before the *mutiyakkitta*, came to be presented separately at the end of each act.

It is also evident that devices like *Pravēshakam*, *Vishkambham*, and the like were borrowed into Kūṭiyāṭṭam. The ritual preliminary *Pūrvarangam* as elaborated in the fifth

chapter of *Nāṭya Sāstra*—observances like *Pratyāhāram*, *Arambham*, *Vakrapāni*, *Sanghōtana*—and all the practices described in verses (such as “gītānam mandrakādinām . . .” “pūrvam sthitalayaḥ Kāryaḥ . . .” “bhṛmgārajjaradharau . . .”; padāni pañcagacchēyuh brahmanoyajanēcchayā . . . “puṣpāñjalyapavangaśca . . .”; “tataḥ salalitairhastairabhivandyaḥ pitāmahaḥ . . .” all began to be conducted in the *Pūrvāranga*.

Apart from Sanskrit dramas, *Kṛamādīpika* and *Āṭṭaparakāram* are two works that form the basis of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. *Kṛamādīpika* describes in detail features such as the role to be played by a certain character, the mode of entrance, the different rhythmic limb movements to be enacted, the mode of exit, and such others. *Āṭṭaparakāram* treats in great detail the *arthābhinaya* (detailed gesticulation to convey the meanings of the words spoken) of the verses and sentences. This includes various modes of acting such as *vāchyārtha* (denoted sense), *vyangyārtha* (connoted sense), *Ślēṣārtha* (wordplay), extra dramatic features like *upashlōkam* (the vidūśakā's parody in Sanskrit sung in reply to the hero's *slōka*), *pratislōkam* (the vidūśakā's translation of the *upashlōka* in simple Malayalam), the modes of expressing different emotions involved in features like *kṛīḍa*, *kōppaṇiyikkuka*, *kailāsōddhāranam*, *pārvaṭiviraham* and the like. Based on the above *Kṛamādīpika* and *Āṭṭaparakāram*, *kūṭiyāṭṭam* is usually performed in a *Kūṭampalam* or temple theatre which is believed to be one of the five protective structures in temples, and in *Kūṭuparambu*, open spaces where scenes created on the basis of “vidikṣvapibhavēndrangam kadāchi bhārtturājñāya” (*Nāṭyas Sāstra*) are presented.

The chief instrument employed for this ancient art form is the *mṛdaṅga* or *mizhāvu*. In his *Nāṭya Sāstra*, Sage Bharata has classified musical instruments under four different heads—*ghaṇam*, *avaṇaddham*, *tatam* and *suśiram*. The *mṛdaṅga* comes under the group *avanaddham*. This instrument was made from clay in ancient times. Later, for the sake of convenience it began to be made from copper. Nowadays, both the copper and the mud instruments are used in Kerala as accompaniment to *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.

There are two types of *Mizhāvu* according to its shape—the round one and the egg-shaped one. Depending on its size, there are three categories—big, medium and small. The temple theatres built for presenting dramas are also of three types—*vikṛṣṭam* (rectangular), *Chaturasṛam* (square) and *tryaśṛam* (triangular). Accordingly the big *mizhāvu* has to be used in the *vikṛṣṭa* temple, the medium in the *Chaturasra* and the small in the *Tryaśra*. This is for ensuring maximum clarity of sound. “*Mṛṇmayattvāl mṛdaṅgastu bhāṇḍam bhaṇayātīca*” *Nāṭya Sāstra*. (Ch. 33 Verse 331.). The *Mṛdaṅga* made of clay is called *bhāṇḍāvādyam* in *Nāṭya Sāstra*. The percussion instrument (*ghaṭavādyā*) described in Sarṅgadeva's *Saṅgītaratnākara* as ‘*ghanaḥ ślakṣṇaḥ supakṣvasa a stōkavaktṛōmahōdarah pāṇibhyām vādyate tajñaiḥ caṛmmānaddhānāḥ ghaṭaḥ*’ appears to be the *Mizhāvu*. In addition to this, references to the *mizhāvu* occur in many ancient literary works. The instrument *Mula* or *kuṭamuḷa* referred to in *Chilappatikāram* seems to be the *mizhāvu*. Alongwith the other musical instruments, the *Mizhāvu* was also used as accompaniment to the dance of Madhavi, the *dēvadāsi* (temple girls who were considered custodians of theatrical arts and dancers before the idol)—‘*tannu maippin vaḷi nintatu mulavai*’. Many other occasions when the *mizhāvu* was used are also described. *Kaṇṇaśśarāmāyaṇam* also has a reference to this instrument in

'*iṭiyākina milāvoliyālēvaṛkkum paritāpam kaḷavān*' (to remove the sorrows of everyone by the thundering sound of the *mizhāvu*). Bāṇa has drummed on the *mizhāvu* impressively in accompaniment to the cosmic dance (*tāṇḍava*) of Lord Siva and was rewarded with a thousand hands—this allusion to the *mizhāvu* occurs in the *Bāṇayuddhaprabandha* as 'ye vadyēna tavaprasādamatulam nṛtai purā pūrayam'. From all these scattered references, it is evident that the *mizhāvu* had been in popular use in this country for centuries. There is an allusion to the *mṛdangaśaila* in the invocational verse in the famous work of Kottayattu Tampuran, the innovator of the art form of Kathakali: '*duṛggām cāpi mṛdangaśailanilayām śrīpōrkkalimiṣṭadām . . .*' This *mṛdangaśaila* is regarded to be the *miḷākkunnu*, where a *mizhāvu* had spontaneously appeared (*svayambhū*). Even in present times, holy ceremonies are offered at that temple where the *mizhāvu* had mysteriously appeared.

Since *kūṭiyattam* is believed to be a *chakṣuṣayaṇa*, the instruments used are also to be maintained as divine and pure:

pīṭhēnyasya mṛdaṅgamiṣṭagaṇapōnāndyādipūnyāhakṛt
tat bhūtāni viśōddhya nandicitimal śnāñāntavastrāvṛtaḥ
hōmōṣṭadhruva samskrīyō yaditadādatōpa-vītādikam
prārccyātoṣyaca rājayēt gururatha prāvārakō vādayēt.

This verse elaborates the procedures for sanctifying the *mizhāvu*. After making the *mizhāvu* from clay or copper, the *tantri* (performer of religious ceremonies) animates it by means of sacred rites: "A seat is made of rice and other food grains and the *mṛdanga* is placed on it. Ganapathi, the lord who removes all obstacles, is first worshipped, and other ceremonies like *nandimukham* (preliminary rites), *pūnyāham* (purification) are carried out. Then Nandi or Nandikēśvara, the lord of all percussion instruments, is invoked. This is followed by the rituals of *snanam* (bath), *vastravaraṇam* (attiring) etc. Then the *homam* (offering to *agni*, the fire) is done, eight ceremonies observed among Brahmins such as *garbhādhānam* (creation of life within the womb), *pumsavanam* (rite to protect and strengthen the life within the embryo), *sīmāntam* (a ceremony which enables the foetus to respond to sounds), *jātakarmam* (ceremonies to be performed when a child is born), *nāmakaraṇam* (naming the new-born child), *annaprāśanam* (initiating the child to eat rice), *chauḷam* (shaving off the hair) and *upanayanam* (leading the child to the guru to get initiated to knowledge) are carried out for the *mizhāvu*. The rite called *upaniṣkramaṇam* or taking the child outside the house for the first time after birth in order to expose it to sunlight is not attempted for the *Mizhāvu*. Then the *Mizhāvu* is considered as asking for initiation (*upanayana*), all offerings are carried out for the attainment of an ideal hour for initiation. At that hour the *pūñūl* (the thread worn across the shoulders by Brahmins) and a piece of deerskin (*ajājinam*), are placed across the *Mizhāvu*. Then the holy rites signifying the sacrifices connected with the study of the four sections of the Vedas (*chaturdravya hōma*) are performed. Finally *prasannapuja* (a ceremony that suggests that the deity is pleased) and *nīrāñjana* (a rite with a view to propitiate) are performed. The Nambiār (one who performs on the *mizhāvu*) then ties a leather piece across the mouth of

the mizhāvu in accordance with the rules. The *tantri* is the first person to drum on the *mizhāvu* and he is followed by the Nambiār.

After conducting all these ceremonies, the *mizhāvu* is presented on stage. All the observances and dances that precede the Sūtradhāraṇa Puṛappādu, are to be performed for this initial presentation of the *mizhāvu* as well. Only a *mizhāvu* that has been sanctified by holy rites can be used as accompaniment in dramas and such other visual arts. A *mizhāvu* which is broken or has become defective has to be accorded all due funeral ceremonies as described in the *Tantrasamuchchaya*.

The Position of the Mizhāvu

“Ye nēpatthyagṛhadvāre mayāpūṇavvam prakīrtite/tayōbhaṇḍasya vinyāsaḥ maddhyēkāryyaḥ prayōktrbhi”: the *mizhāvu* has to be placed on the stage at a point equidistant between the entrance and exit of the *nēpatthyagṛha* (sanctified green room) in the Kūttampalam.

Beliefs Regarding the mizhāvu

It is believed that the *mizhāvu* is positioned at the *kutapasthāna* (a position in the eastern front of the temple, a little spaced towards the right) of the *nātyaprāsāda* (the temple structure meant for performing arts) which is one of the five protective structures of the temples, and observes eternal celibacy with its mind fixed in pure devotion on the *nāḍabrahma* (the Ultimate or Absolute Sound), worshipping it with the sound “om.”

The other instruments used for Kūttu and Kūtiyāṭṭam are iṭaykka, sanhku, kurumkuzhal, kulitāḷan and timila. iṭaykka is drummed in agreement to the rhythms set up on the *mizhāvu*. The *śruti* (the basic background tune) is provided by the *kurumkuzhal*. The sound of the conch (*saṅkhanāḍam*) enhances the richness of the other musical notes. The function of the *kulitāḷam* is to control the rhythm and blend all the sounds produced. This pañchavādyamēḷam (blending of the music from five instruments) enlivens the dramatic action and makes it appealing to the spectators.

vādyēṣuyatnaḥ prathamastu kāryyaḥ
śayyā hi nātyasya vadanti vādyam
vādyē ca gīte ca susamprayuktē
nātyaprayōgo nā vipattimēti. (*Nātya Sāstra* Ch. 33. Verse 334)

The above precept highlights the authority and importance of the use of musical instruments. Each phenomenon in the universe is based on *tāla*—the word *tāla* has its origin from the sound ‘tala’. ‘Tala’ talapṛatīṣṭhāyamiti dhāto khañi smṛtaḥ. The sound ‘t’ in *tala* represents Śiva and the ‘l’ sound signifies Śakti, the consort of Śiva. It is also seen that ‘takāra: śankara: prōkta: lakāra: śaktirucyate śiva śaktyatmākastālā . . .’ Just as Śiva and Śakti are the source and basis of the universe, rhythm (*tāla*) is also the basis of this universe.

Each movement in the universe is based on a certain rhythm—the flight of birds, the flow of rivers, the chirping of birds, are all rhythmic. Similarly song, musical instruments and dance are all grounded in rhythm. *Tāla* or rhythm is controlled by *kāla* (time)—*tala*

has to be correctly timed. One who employs a musical instrument without an awareness of *tāla* or *kāla* is described in the Śāstras as: “*atālañāmākālañāmaśaṣṭrajñam ca vādakam/caṣṭmaghātakamityevam pravādanti manīṣinaḥ*”

Kūttu and Kūṭiyāṭṭam performed in the Sanskrit dramatic tradition emphasises the four kinds of acting—*sātvika* (the spirited), *vāchika* (speech), *āṅgika* (bodily) and *āhāryaka* (assemblage or decor). The *tālās* used for Kūṭiyāṭṭam are Ekatāla Tṛipuṭatāla, Jhampatala Dhruvatala Chempaṭatāla Atantatāla, Pañchari, Lakshmītāla, Maṭhyatala and Mallatāla.

1. *Ēkatālam* is the mode of drumming maintaining a *laghu* (4 *akshara*). *Chaturasrajāti ēkatala*—its unit is four *akṣharakāla*, where the *akṣharakāla* signifies the time for the completion of one cycle of the *tāla*. Here three *laghus* are counted and the fourth is the actual beat—*takatum, takatum, takatum* (this is the beat).

2. *Tṛipuṭatālā* this has an *akṣharakāla* of 7 and belongs to the *tryasara* or the *fīra* variety. Counting 2, The third is the time-beat; then counting one, the next is the beat, again one is counted and the next is the beat: dhi ka taka taka taka, dhi ka ta ka ta ka ta ka, dhi ka taka ta ka ta ka ta ka . . .

3. *Tṛipuṭa* (mishrachappu) -its *akṣharakāla* is 3 1/2, it is the *miṣṛacchap* variety. Three are drummed, one left and thus carried on: Dhi ka ta ka ta, ta ka ta, ta ka ta . . . ti, tti, tta.

4. *Jhampatāla* (khaṇḍachappu) has an *akṣharakāla* of 10 and is drummed in half *akṣharakāla* of 5. This *tāla* is adopted in Kūṭiyāṭṭam.

5. *Dhruvatāla*—drummed in an *akṣharakāla* of 14. This belongs to the *chaturasra* variety. The beat comes after five counts, then after three counts, again after three counts—drummed in the mode 6, 4, 4, . . .

6. *Chempaṭatāla* is *chaturasrajāti tṛipuṭa* having an *akṣharakāla* of 8. the beat falls on the fourth count. The first beat falls after 3 counts, the second after one count, the third again after one count and so on.

7. *Aṭatāla* has an *akṣharakāla* of 14 *khaṇḍajāti aṭatālam*. Here the first four are beats, then one count, again four beats, then one count and so on: Ti ti ti tai, ti ti ti tai, tai, tai,...

8. *Lakshmītāla*, nowadays used only for *Jatāyū's* performance: Dhi ti tai taka dhikatattai taka dhittai dhikatai dhilai ta dhi ka ta tai . . .

9. *Panchari* has an *akṣharakāla* of 6: dhakkitta dhikkitta . . . is the mode.

In addition to these *tālās*, *madhyatāla*, *mallatāla* and many others are said to have been used but the mode of drumming these is unknown.

The Modes of Using Tāla

Various technical rules are applied to the *vāchika* acting in *Kuṭiyāṭṭam*. *Rāgas* (notes) are attributed in accordance with different characters, variations of the constant *bhāva*, variety of stylised limb movements and variety of occasions. In accordance with the manner of reciting the Vedas, and on the basis of *udātta*, *anudātta* and *svarita* notes, the *rāgas* are Muḍḍhan, Sṛikanthi, Tontu, Artan, Indaḷam, Muralindalam, Veladhūli, Dānam, Viṭataṛkkan, Taṛkkan, Korakkuruṇṇi, Paurāḷi, Poranīru, Duhkhagāndhāram, Cetipaṇcamam, Bhiṇṇapaṇcamam, Virapaṇcamam, Sṛikamaram, Kaiṣiki, Ghattantari, Antari. Indala *rāga* is usually employed by ideal, brave and noble characters. *Ārtaraga*

suits a mood of *sambhōgaśringāravastha* (the erotic *rasa* in union). *Chetipchañamam* becomes appropriate for medicore characters.

This tune is also used by evil characters and children. *Muḍḍan* is considered best for the *sambhōgasringāravastha* of demons (*rākṣhasās*). On the other hand, their *vipralambhasringāra* (the erotic in separation) is best conveyed by means of *Muralindala*. This *rāga* suits Sri Rama in his *sambhōgaśringāravastha* while *Dānam* and *Bhīṇāpañchamam* are regarded the best for revealing the *adbhuta rasa* (the wondrous) inherent in the *sambhōgaśringāravastha* of Sri Rama. The *Dukkhagāndhāra* is commonly used by all characters to suggest *Śōka* (sorrow) and *karuṇam* (pathetic). When angry or cruel, *Tarkkarāga* is adopted, for *vīrarasa*, *Vīratarkkan* is the ideal note. To convey *adbhuta rasa*, *Dāna rāga* is used. Sometimes this *rāga* is also employed to suggest the *bhayānaka rasa* (fear) as well. *Toṇṭu* is a *raga* conveying the *sānta rasa* (peace) and *bhakti* (devotion). *Ghaṭṭantari rāga* provides the ideal note for conveying news regarding defeat and destruction of evil characters. However, this *raga* is also employed in prayer songs to a favourite deity. While *Korakkurinni rāga* is usually suggestive of monkeys, the *Poranīru rāga* is employed for descriptions of monsoons and mornings. *Śrīkanthi* is used at the end of an act, in the description of dusk and noon, slaughter of evil tyrants and in devotional moods.

Vēladhūlirāga is utilised in passages where frightened characters cry out or listen from a far. *Śrīkamaram* is to describe the shyness of one stirred by *kama* (desire). There is also a *karika* or verse denoting the rhythms and music that are to be employed in accordance with the *bhāva* pictured.

Muḍḍartta (*vīratarkēṣu*) *cēti pañca dāṇayō/ korakkurīṇṇi rāgeca dhruvatāla: prakīrtita*. Music rendered in the *Dhruvatāla* has to be used in verses and sentences rendered in *Muḍḍhan Arttan*, *Vīratarka*, *Chetipañchama*, *Dāna* and *Korakkurīṇṇi*.

*Śrīkanthi, toṇṭu, puranīr, Kaiśikyāmindalēpi ca
ēkatālō vitiṛḍḍiṣṭaḥ bhīṇa pancamaduhkhayōḥ*

Ēkatālam of the *caturaśra* kind is to be used for *Śrīkanthi*, *Tontu*, *Puranīru*, *Kaiśiki*, *indalam*, *Bhinnapancama*, *Dukkhagāndhara*.

*ghaṭṭantaryyākya rāge ca tarkke cāntarisamjñite
tripuṭā tāla ēvasyāl saviḷambita māṭṭaka:*

The *rāgās Ghaṭṭantari, Tarkan* and *Antari* are to have as background the *tripuṭa tāla* in *viḷambita kāla* or (slow-paced).

*Maddhyamamāṭṭrām tripuṭam vēladhūlyām vadanti tālajnaḥ
apare punarhināṭye dhruva iti kaiścil samākhyātaḥ*

Vēladhūli rāga has to be accompanied by *Tripuṭa tāla* in a medium pace (*maddhyamamāṭṭra*). There is a difference of opinion that here *dhruvāla* can also be used.

śrīkāmara ca pauraḷyām tripuṭātīdrutā matā

(For *Śrīkāmara* and *Paurāḷi rāgās*, the accompanying *tāla* is *tripuṭa* beat in the *atīdruta* (*muṇḍukiya tripuṭa* in a very fast *kāla*.)

muralindalārāge ca dhruvatālo viḷambita

(In dramatic passages enacted in the *Muralindalārāga*, *dhruvatāla* in a slow pace is regarded ideal.)

ēkatālēna kāryyam syā bhaññyal sarvvaṃ yadhōcitam.

A special rule, that *ekatāla* can be used according to the occasions is also in prevalence among the musicians.

The Orchestra (mēla) in Kūṭiyāṭṭam

Various rhythms and different kinds of musical notations are employed in *āṭṭam* (performance where actors express ideas by limb movements and facial expressions) and dances in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. The *mēla* in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* varies in accordance with the subtle variations in characters, acting, movement, and the constant *bhāvas* expressed. The different *mēla* in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* can be broadly classified into three: (1) *Mēla* suitable for dance movements formulated according to various rhythms and music as in *Mattavilāsam*, *Anguliyāṅkam*, *Manṭrāṅkam* and other common practices; (2) *Mēla* catering to emotionally significant elaborate acting, like *ilakiyāṭṭam*, *cholliyāṭṭam*, *anvayiccatṭam*, *ślōkāṭṭam*; (3) *Mēla* played on the stage when no characters are present.

Gestures and Movements

There are many technical names by which the dramatic representations in *Kūṭṭu* and *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* are known. Some of these are *chari*, *kaḷakaḷavādyam*, *jāti*, *tappiyiṇṇaḷ*, *taṭṭu*, *meyyu*, *nirggīta*, *baṇḍhaṇanirggīta*, *parikramam*, *jāti koṇṭu mukhavaṇṇa*, *raṇṭām*, *naṭa*, *āṣiyaṣi pullarikkuka*, *māṭameṭukkuka*, *hāsyakṛiya*, *kōṇṭāṭṭam kṛiya*, *cheriyakku*, *valiyakku*, *dhruva*, *kuṇṇam*, *dikpālakavaṇḍanam*—these are all stylised movements of the legs and hands. Action of roaming is suggested in *ambarāyaṇam*, (movements in the sky), *kaḷappuṇṇu naṭakkuka* (stylised walking of noble male characters), *chelluntinaṭakkuka* (stylised movement of female characters), *vattattil natakkuka*, *vattattil chati natakkuka*, *ōṭi naṭakkuka*. Special limb movements are suggested in *yuddachāri*, *kṛida*, *mayilāṭṭam*, *jatāyuvinte tālam chaviṭṭuka* and *ulkaṭṭana*. *Simhasṭhōbha*, *gajasthōbha*, *pakṣisthōbha* and *vānarasthōbha* are emotional displays. With all these impressive actions, the actors and their acting are imparted vigour and elegance and the scene made striking with appropriate background music in different *tāḷas* like *Chempāṭa*, *Tṛiputā*, *Ekatalam*, *Dhruvam*, *Lakshmitāḷam* and others. Some of the technicalities that a musician playing on the *mizhāvu* ought to be aware of, when the above acts are presented, are provided below.

Taṭṭu: A Dance Form

This is acted by the character called *Kāpāli* in Mahendravarikrama Pallava's farce *Mattavilāsa*. This is accompanied in the quick placed *Tṛiputā tāla*. Vasantaka's action in Bhasa's *Pratijñayaugandharāyaṇa* (*Manṭrāṅkam* Act 3) is the *Tṛiputātāla* while the dance of the madman *Yaugandharāyaṇa* in the same drama is in the quick-paced *Jhampātāla*; that of Hanuman in *Chudamani* (Ch. 6, *Anguliyāṅkam*), is in quick-paced *Tṛiputātāla*. Though all these actions are falling under the same name, they are acted differently and the *tāḷas* used are different. However, some actions do not differ in their presentation; only the mode of *tāḷa* is different.

Jāti

This act is done by many characters—the dance steps do not differ. But the beats of the music are quite different. The oral formula of one or two actions are given below as

examples. When *Jati* is acted by Kāpāli, the *Tāla* is *Tripūta*: ti, tti, taṭinkīṭi taṭinkīṭi thṛēm (2 times); ti tti taṭinkīṭi taṭinkīṭi, taṭinkīṭikīṭikīṭi, taṭinkīṭi taṭinkīṭi thṛēm. When the same act is done by the *Bhrānta* (madman), the *tāla* remains *tripūta*:

titti, thṛēm thṛēm taraha taraha thṛēm (3 times)
titti, thṛēm thṛēm taraha taraha thṛēm thṛēm taraha,
thṛēm thṛēm taraha taraha tarahathṛēm

For Hanuman:

ti tti tta, ta, taraha, tarahathṛēm (2 times)
ti tti tta, ta, taraha, tarahatta, ta taraha, tatta taraha
taraha thṛēm.

The Act Called *Taṭṭu*

1. For Kāpāli, the *tāla* is *Tripūta* ti tti tta, taṭinkīṭi, . . . ti tti tta, taṭinkīṭi ti tti tta, taṭinkīṭi, taṭinkīṭi, taṭinkīṭi' (thus twice). When the beat is repeated the second time, *tripūtatāla* is employed till tatiṭinkīṭithṛēm, tittakitim tati kiti thṛēm" and *Jhampa tāla* is used for the portion "kitithṛēm dhakukkum".

2. For Bhrānta (mad man), the *tāla* is *Jhampa*: "kititta, kitikiti, thṛēm thṛēm thṛēm thṛēm taraha thṛēm (2 times):

kititta kitikitithṛēm thṛēm, ta kitikiti,
tthṛēm tthṛēm ta, tthṛē tthṛēm ta,
tthṛēm thṛēm ta kiti kiti, tthṛēm
tthṛēm tthṛēm tthṛēm tarahathṛēm
kitithṛēm thakukkum . . .

3. For Hanuman, *muṛukiya tripūtatāla* is utilised:

ti tti tta, tarahathṛēm, tarathṛēm, tarahathṛēm
ti tta kki tim tarahathṛēm—ti tti tta, ti tti tthṛēm
ti tti tta tarahathṛēm . . .

Tālas to be employed for certain *ulkkhattanas* can also be described: "samvṛttam tumūlam yuddham"; the section is from 'tōṇayuddhāṅkām' in Bhasa's *Abhishekanāka*. The context is one where Sankukarna informs Ravana that Indrajit had imprisoned Hanuman. This is a joyous dance performed in an ecstatic mood of jumping up and down. Here *chaturāśrajāti Tripūtatāla* is used. *Murukiya Jhampatāla* is made use of in Vasantaka's act in *Mantrāṅka*—*indirā vayaṭa tarppaṇam koḷḷata*., Śurppaṇakha's *ulkkhattana*, 'indranum chandranum enikku venta' is accompanied by *muṛukiya tripūta tāla*. 'uṇṇaṭa uṇṇaṭa pāccōṟum veṇṇayum / kēṛata kēṛata, kaṭṭilum mettayum'—this is the context which expresses the overwhelming joy of Atrēya who jumps ecstatically on knowing that his dear friend Jimutavahana had married Malayavati; the passage occurs in *Nāgañandam Kūṭiyāṭam*. The *tāla* here is also *muṛukiya Tripūta*. Thus different *ulkkhattana* are rendered in different *tālas*.

The former kind of *mēla* referred to here are those that act as accompaniment to the dances of ethereal beings and earthly beings, mostly acted in the form of worshipping the deity. This *mēla* usually accompanies acts where dance is of prime importance. The second category is in accordance with the *bhava* expressed: 'iha bhāvarasāsaiva dṛṣṭi:

sampratiṣṭhitah dṛṣṭaiva sūcitōhyarttāh paścādangai vibhāvayate.' Most of the musical notes in Kūṭiyāṭṭam give importance to *bhāva*. They are appropriate for enacting *bhāva* (*bhāvābhinaya*). The mode of employing a *tāla* suitable to a *rasa* has already been discussed. Accordingly, though the same *tālas* are utilized for the enactment of various *bhāvās*, the difference in the style of rendering is evident. Some examples can be quoted to illustrate the point:

In passages like "chala kuvalaya dhāmno... (*Subhadrādhānāṇjaya*. Act 1) and "Sasimani śitasēyam . . . (*Naganandam*. Act 2), which give importance to the *śṛṅgāra* *rasa*, when performed in detail, Dhruva tala is employed as background. This *tāla* is drummed softly, indicative of the inherent *rasa* and is made significant by means of various subtleties. The Dhruva *tāla* that accompanies verses rendered by noble heroes like Arjuna or Jimutavahana in *Artarāga* is not similar to the Dhruva tala that is used for the performance of Ravana in *śṛṅgārārasa*—Ravana's performance which otherwise stresses the *vīrarasa*. The verse is one that begins 'Himakara hima garbharasya stavakina. . .'. (*Chudāmaṇi*. Act 5) This is drummed with some vigour but without employing many subtle innovations. In the verse passage "aparagiriṇiṣaṇṇam . . ." which is a description of dusk, when performed in *Śrīkanthi rāga*, the corresponding *tāla* is *chaturāśrajāti Ēkatāla* in *patinjakāla* (slow tempo). This *tāla* is drummed in agreement to the *bhāva*, *mudra* (gesture) and movements. The same *tāla* varies subtly when employed for 'rakṣōvadhādvirata kaṣṇma . . .'. (*Chudāmaṇi*. Act 5) rendered in *raga Śrīkanthi*. Here the *raga* employed is slightly suggestive of *Vīrarasa* (heroic) and indicative of the *sthāya bhāva* of Hanuman. However, a performance totally different from all these is *Parvativiraham*. The verse that is the basis for enacting *Parvativiraha* (Parvati's separation from her beloved) is:

maulau kinnu mahēśa maninijalam kim vakṛamambhōruham
kim nīlākavēṇika bhṛamarika kim bhṛūlate vicikē
nēṭṭe kim śaphari kimustanayugam prēmkhadrathāṅgadvayam
sā śāṅkāmiti vañcayan girisutām cāṅgadhara: patuva: . . .

This stanza deals with the queries of Parvati to Lord Siva and the lies spoken by Siva in the nature of excuses. A mood of angry irritation is imparted for Parvati's questions and that of a deceptive innocence to Siva's answers, by the *chaturāśrajāti Ēkatāla*. The orchestra that begins in a very slow tempo approaches the second stage on the occasion of Parvati leaving the side of Siva; the music becomes taut when the context depicts the turbulence of *Kailāsa* (the abode of Siva) and Parvati's subsequent fear. When Parvati finally takes refuge in Siva, the music reverts to its original tempo. The high and low pitch of the *tāla* effectively represents the ascent and descent of emotions. On the whole, this occasion is one which excellently reflects the emotional turbulence in the characters portrayed.

Similarly, there are differences in the use of the *Tripuṭatāla* as well. The *tāla* is beat in the normal tone for *Antari raga*, with more vigour, and in *madhyamakāla* (medium tempo) when employed with *Tarka, rāga*. When used with *Paurālirāga*, the *Tripuṭatāla* is drummed with the maximum tempo, in the *atidrutakāla*. When the *tāla* acts as background for special performances like *Kailāsōddhārana* (the lifting of Kailasa), or taking a look at Kailasa, it has to be drummed without break and in the same manner. If

the *mizhavu* artist introduces breaks in the *tāla*, the spectator may not fully comprehend the magnificence and height of *Kailasa*. When the mountain is described, the *tāla* is in *madhyamalaya* (medium tempo). To depict the mountain tops breaking open to give rise to rivers, the *tāla* is begun in a soft tempo. Slowly it gains tempo and attains the maximum vigour towards the end to picturize the width of the river and shows it merging in the sea. In an act demonstrating the upheaval of a mountain, the *tāla* picks up tempo in degrees in accordance with the increasing weight of the mountain and reaches the highest pitch. In such context, the *tāla* has to be effectively drummed with increasing intensity, if the actor's performance is to be convincing.

Another occasion for *mēla* is *Paṭappurappātu* (preparation to go to war). The *tāla* employed in this instance is *tripuṭatāla*. To suggest the movement of armies towards the battlefield, they are presented as setting forth to the accompaniment of many musical instruments. In such instances, the Nambiar uses his sense of discretion and endeavours to simulate an approximation of the sounds of different musical instruments to the best of his ability on the *Mizhavu*. For example, to evoke a sound of drinking liquor, a 'kudu kudu kudu' sound is produced on the *mizhavu* by the particular positioning of the finger and the palm on it—the finger is placed on the edge of the *Mizhavu* and the folded left palm in its middle. There are many other instances similar to this.

An artist performing on the *Mizhavu* has to clearly conceive the *prakṛta* (story enacted), hero and the other characters, the occasion (contexts of acting in accordance with *rasās* like *śṛṅgāra*), *bhāva*, *artha* (meaning), and evoke reasonably subtle sound variations and thereby perform skilfully in order to generate the intended *bhāva*. To succeed in producing music reflecting all the *bhāvās*, an artist has to possess considerable knowledge, practice, familiarity with the stage traditions, talent and an ability for aesthetic appreciation and full-fledged devotion to God.

Another occasion for the orchestra which emphasizes *bhāva* is the orchestra that accompanies the performance of the *Vidūshaka* in *Ekatāla*. The *Vidūshaka* is a comic character who appears on the stage as the humorous companion of the hero. His comic actions include *pūṇunūlu tēkkal* (rubbing his *pūṇunūl*), *kutuma verpetuttal* (the *kutuma* refers to the tuft of hair worn in a knot at the front or back of the head—the *Vidūshaka* would untie this knot and run his hands through the hair), *muṇṭu piliṇṇu viśal* (fanning himself with his *melmundu*, an upper garment), fanning his companion, acting servilely to his friend (actions like massaging his companion's hands) and many others. This *mēla* is maintained in *Ekatāla* and is most suitable for the *Vidūshaka*'s performance. This kind of *mēla* is virtually absent in other kinds of comic arts. In short, *mēla* catering to the dominant *bhāva* is indispensable for *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, which is a visual art that lays emphasis on the *satva* element in acting.

The third kind of *mēla* is referred to in *Nāṭya Sastra* as: *aṅgānāntu samatvārtham cchidra praccadāne tatha viśṛāmahēśśōbhārtham bhāṇḍavādyam prayōjayēt* (Ch. 33, Verse 18) and in *Saṅgitaratnakara* as 'viśṛāntau rangasamsthānāmgatāyām nṛtyatāmapi'. According to these, this *mēla* is to be employed during intervals when there are no characters on the stage and on such occasions the orchestra serves to entertain the audience and prevent boredom. It also assists in filling the gap that may be created during intervals. The basic *tāla* employed here is the *chaturāśrajāti* *Triputa*. Occasionally this

mēla is enriched by introducing *talas* that normally accompany Tāyambaka (a kind of orchestral performance on the drums). Sometimes flutes are also made use of during intervals. It was a common practice to sing *kīrtāṇas* (songs in praise of deities) in *rāgās* like Saveri on the Kurumkuzhal. This practice also helped to engage the attention of the spectators and pleasing them. The Nambiar has to be extremely cautious in providing the appropriate *mela* using various *tālās* that perfectly harmonise with the gestures of the actor, the action, the *bhāvās* enacted and the different kinds of stylised movement. Intervals were ideal occasions for the Nambiar to display his genius, harmoniously blending the sound of the *mizhavu* with the sounds of other musical instruments employed, thereby helping to create a wonderful effect of the *Pancavadyamela* (ensemble of five instruments).

Tāyambaka on the Mizhāvu

This is a type of performance on the *mizhāvu* in which the Nambiar is provided an opportunity to prove his practice, skill and genius. The *tāla* is *Chembaṭa*, first drummed in a low tempo and then raised to a middle tempo (different types of middle tempo like *etavattam*, *etanila*); the *kūru* (a technical term) may be any one like *cembakkūru*, *aṭantakkūru*, *pancharikkūru*, a low *chembakkūru*. The tempo approaches the *irukiṭa* (when the drummer is almost in a sitting position). This performance demands great skill and effort on the part of the Nambiar. Tāyambaka is usually performed in between the practice called *mizhāvochchappettuttal* (the sounding at the beginning of Kūttu and Kūṭiyattam when the *mizhavu* is placed or to make it perfect for performance), a performance in *Ekatala*.

There is no doubt that good orchestral music contributes considerably towards the effectiveness of the acting. It may be emphasized that the skill in performing on the musical instrument acts as the deciding factor regarding the clarity and elegance of the gestures, the intensity of the eyes, the effectiveness of the *bhavas*, the perfection of the subtle stylised walking—all aspects of *abhinaya* (acting) on the stage.

Compared to the musical instruments employed in other visual arts like Kathakali, the *Mizhavu* poses considerable difficulties when it has to provide background *tala* for different gestures and acts. In the first place, the position of the *Mizhavu* is behind the actor. The *mudrābhinaya* (acting by gestures) cannot be easily seen by the Nambiar stationed behind the actor and therefore it is difficult for him to provide always the *tala* in accordance with the gestures. Secondly, performances in the *Sākhachamkrāmaṇa* modes have to be specially comprehended and the corresponding *tāla* given—this is also a hard task. To attain craftsmanship on the *Mizhāvu*, the artist has to have considerable practice, a comprehensive knowledge of Kūṭiyāttam, familiarity with drama and stage traditions, an awareness of the legendary stories, knowledge of *mudrās*, *rasās* and *rāgās*, ability to understand character, a detailed understanding of various kinds of stylised walking (*charibhēdās*), a mastery of Sanskrit, awareness of the different *tālās*, tempo and tune, knowledge regarding the important points on the *Mizhavu* that are the sources of musical notations on the instrument, and original talent. Above all, he should also possess a sincere devotion to art, his *guru*, and God:

sphuṭapraharām viśādam vibhaktam
raktam vikrstam karalēpañamca
ṭṭimārjjanāpūrīta rāgagamyam
mṛḍangavādyam guṇanō vadaṇṭi. (*Natya Sastra*. Ch. 33, Verse 333)

Translated from Malayalam by Jayasree Ramakrishnan.